

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Tennessee Cougars

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

No animal seems to get people as excited as cougars.

Until recently, there haven't been any cougars confirmed in Tennessee for decades, but the state of Tennessee recently confirmed four cougar sightings there, thanks to photos, video, and a hair sample which displayed genetics similar to cougars in South Dakota.

The cougar is North America's largest cat, with the common western cougar inhabiting Mexico and the American and Canadian west; the endangered Florida panther in the tip of Florida; and the now extinct eastern cougar once inhabiting the eastern United States.

The Tennessee animal, or animals, are believed to be western cougars wandering east, outside of their range. Western cougars have been expanding their range eastward, recolonizing the Midwest, and it's well-documented that cougars can travel hundreds of miles exploring territory. State wildlife biologists point out this is likely just an animal passing through and doesn't mean cougars are established in Tennessee, something that would require the presence of reproducing females.

The Tennessee sighting are in west Tennessee, and although cougar reports are frequent in the southern Appalachians, there is no confirmation of the sightings – no quality photos, no hair or tissue, and certainly no bodies, and it's an issue complicated by hoax reports.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.